

FINDINGS

New Approaches Boost Food Stamp Participation by Elderly People

USDA's Food Stamp Program (FSP) is designed to enable low-income Americans to buy nutritious foods. However, not all who are eligible to participate do so. Just over half (54 percent) of all eligible people participated in fiscal year 2002, and only about one in four eligible elderly people participate. These low participation rates might signal that barriers exist for elderly people in accessing the FSP. In 2002, USDA and six States tested approaches to increasing participation by low-income elderly through three demonstration projects. Simplifying the application process, helping the elderly complete the process, and substituting food packages for food stamps boosted participation.

In the first demonstration project, two counties in Florida simplified the applica-



tion process by using a one-page, large-print application form. Applicants were required to prove their citizenship, but many other FSP documentation requirements were eliminated. Face-to-face interviews were waived, and social security income was verified electronically using existing databases.

In the second project, special application assistants in four counties in Arizona, Maine, and Michigan worked one-on-one with elderly applicants to help them understand program requirements, assemble required documents, and complete the application.

The final demonstration project offered elderly households without nonelderly members the choice of receiving packages of USDA-supplied foods in place of food

stamps. Local nonprofit organizations in the Hartford, CT, area and Alamance County, NC, assembled the packages and delivered them to demonstration project participants at congregate meal sites, food banks, and other places where low-income elderly are likely to gather. Participants with disabilities or transportation difficulties could have their packages delivered to their homes.

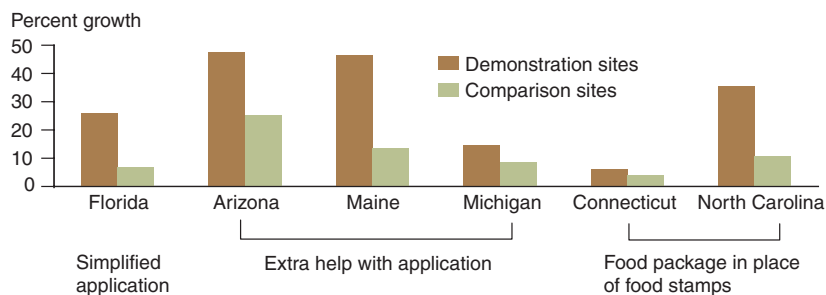
To estimate the impact of the demonstration projects, growth in participation at the demonstration sites was compared with participation growth at demographically similar comparison sites and the difference was attributed entirely to the demonstration projects. Preliminary findings show that growth in FSP participation by eligible elderly at the demonstration sites outpaced participation growth at the comparison sites, although differences varied by project and by State. For example, providing one-on-one assistance to elderly applicants boosted participation 33 percentage points more at the demonstration site than at the comparison sites in Maine, 22 points more in Arizona, and 6 points more in Michigan. Future analyses will refine and test the validity of these preliminary estimates. W

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This finding is drawn from . . .

Food Stamp Program—Elderly Nutrition Demonstrations: Interim Report on Elderly Participation Patterns, by Scott Cody, Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., ERS project representative: Elizabeth Dagata, E-FAN-04-009, USDA/ERS, June 2004, available at: www.ers.usda.gov/publications/efan04009/

Growth in elderly FSP participation was higher in demonstration sites



Hog Contracts Signal Producers To Improve Quality

Nearly 70 percent of hogs in the U.S. are sold to pork slaughter companies (packers) under pre-arranged marketing contracts, up from 11 percent in 1993. Marketing contracts between packers and hog producers typically specify the quantity of hogs to be purchased on specified dates and places, and provide hog producers a secure outlet and specific pricing terms. Many of these contracts awarded price premiums for carcass leanness and weight, providing strong incentives for producers to raise lean hogs needed for the lower fat meats demanded by consumers. From 1992 to 2002, the percentage of lean muscle of a typical pork carcass rose from 49.5 to 55.5 percent.

But this leanness came at a cost. The genetic lines that produced leaner hogs were often carriers of the "stress" gene, which was linked to a condition referred to as "pale, soft, and exudative" (PSE). PSE pork—which is disliked by packers, retailers, and consumers—has a very light color, soft texture, and is subject to fluid loss. Controlling the PSE condition proved to be difficult because packers must be able to measure and reward producers for reducing PSE-related attributes. However, indicators of the PSE condition could not be readily measured at high-speed processing lines that slaughter 1,000 hogs per hour. In addition, by the time PSE problems become apparent (20-24 hours post-mortem), the identity of the producer may have been lost.

Barry Runk/Grant Heilman Photography

ECONOMIC RESEARCH SERVICE/USDA

Americans' Whole-Grain Consumption Below Guidelines

Evidence indicates that eating whole grains can reduce the risk of heart disease and some cancers. The newly revised *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*, released in January 2005, recommend that half of all daily grain servings be whole grains. For an individual who consumes 2,200 calories a day, this would mean eating 3½ ounces of whole grains a day, equal to 1½ cups of cooked brown rice or 3½ slices of whole-wheat bread.

Food availability and food intake data tell us that most Americans are not meeting these guidelines. Historically, Americans have consumed ever-increasing amounts of refined-grain products and fewer servings of whole grains. ERS researchers annually calculate the amount of food available for human consumption in the United States. The food availability data measure the flow of raw and semi-processed food commodities through the U.S. marketing system. Between 1972 and 2003, per capita annual availability of all grain products increased 46 percent, from 133 pounds per person to 194 pounds per person.

After adjusting the availability data for waste and losses, Americans were eating, on average, 10 servings of grains a day in 2003—three servings more than recommended by the new dietary guidelines for someone who consumes 2,200 calories per day. Of those 10 servings, whole grains accounted for just over 1 serving. In food intake surveys from 1999-2000, nearly 40 percent of Americans did not report eating any whole grains in an entire day.

In the past, dietary changes have developed slowly over time. Food manufacturers can serve as catalysts to change by quickly responding to or even anticipating dietary trends. ERS researchers found

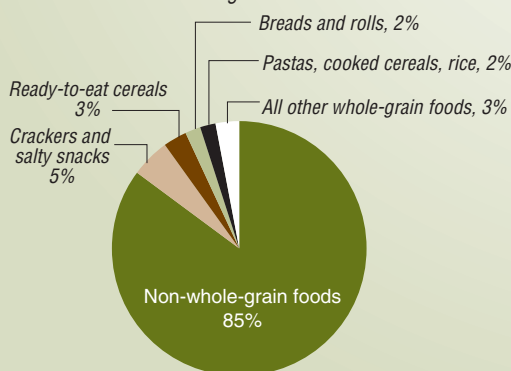


USDA

ERS annually calculates the amount of grains and several hundred other foods available for consumption in the U.S. This series provides data back to 1909 for many commodities and is the only continuous source of data on food and nutrient availability in the U.S. For more information, visit www.ers.usda.gov/data/food-consumption.

How Americans consume their grains

Americans eat their whole grains as:



Source: ERS analysis of 1999-2000 National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) data.

that for those consumers who said they ate whole-grain foods, the bulk of those foods consisted of whole-grain crackers, salty snacks, and ready-to-eat cereals. Responding to greater emphasis on the health benefits of whole grains, General Mills announced that it would reformulate all of its breakfast cereals to qualify them as either a good or excellent source of whole grains. As other major food manufacturers change product formulations and introduce new whole-grain products, consumers may find whole-grain products more plentiful. W

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Packers turned to marketing contracts to maintain incentives for producing leaner hogs and, at the same time, control PSE-related attributes. These marketing contracts strove to limit PSE problems by specifying and monitoring input requirements—most importantly genetic lines. How hogs are handled also influences PSE. For example, minimal force while moving hogs, nonslip loading ramps, and less crowding of hogs while on the way to the packing plant all make for less stressed hogs.

While considerable progress has been made in breeding out the stress gene, two pork quality audits revealed that the PSE condition actually worsened—rising from 10.2 percent of slaughter hogs in 1992 to 15.5 percent in 2002. This suggests hog-handling problems may have

become an important contributor to PSE-related problems. Some large pork companies stipulate in their marketing contracts that producers raise hogs in a humane manner or in a way that optimizes pork quality. W

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This finding is drawn from . . .

Pork Quality and the Role of Market Organization, by Steve W. Martinez and Kelly Zering, AER-835, USDA/ERS, October 2004, available at: www.ers.usda.gov/publications/aer835/